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ABSTRACT

The adult characterizations in seven novels written for teen-age girls--four published in 1950 and three published in the late 1960s--were evaluated on the basis of four criteria: consistency, evident motivation, plausibility, and scope of activity. The evaluations were then compared to determine if a change could be detected from the earlier to the later period. It was determined that all seven novels depicted consistency in adult characters, and that all but one portrayed the motivation of the adult characters. However, the characters in four of the seven books (three from 1950 and one from 1967) were represented as implausibly tolerant, generous, and good-natured; and in one of the later books the adults were portrayed as implausibly bad. The adults in the earlier books also had a strong stereotypic tendency. The scope of the adult activities was generally very narrow: the professions of the men often were barely mentioned, none of the mothers worked outside the home, and only one mother belonged to a women's organization. A comparison of the books suggests that the later characterizations were generally no more realistic than the earlier ones, although there had been a shift toward acknowledging (and, in one case, overemphasizing) the faults of adult characters. (GT)

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# ADULT PORTRAYAL IN NOVELS FOR TEEN-AGE GIRLS

by

Paula M. Weick

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ABSTRACT

This paper compared seven novels written for teen-age girls on the basis of the characterization of the adults in the story. Four of the novels were published in 1950, the remaining three in the late 1960's. The adult characterization was evaluated for each novel and the evaluations compared to determine if they evidenced a change in that area over an almost twenty year time period. Most of the characterizations were found to be quite unrealistic, though the trend to admitting to faults in adults that appeared in the later books gives a basis for hope for improvement in the future.

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Chapter 1

# INTRODUCTION

The junior novel, written specifically for the young adult, appeared in the early 1930's amid a flurry of literary protests. Although these novels were criticized on almost every conceivable ground, they rapidly came to form an indispensable segment of any young adult library collection. Despite ridicule and disclaimers of their possessing any literary value, the books have come to be purchased in evergrowing numbers. They are tolerated in the hope that they will serve as a bridge between children's books and mature adult literature, and also because it is hoped that through reading these books adolescents will absorb the customs, values, and requirements of our society.[1]

Recently, however, there have been complaints that the junior novels are not filling these roles. One study concluded that they might be a path to the slick fiction of the pulp magazines, but not to good literature.[2] The fulfilling of the second desired

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[1]Cecilia Magaliff, The Junior Novel (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1964), p. 82.

[2]Barbara Martinec, "Popular--But Not Just a Part of the Crowd: Implications of Formula Fiction for Teenagers," English Journal, 60 (March, 1971), 339-40. (She was a graduate student in English at the University of Chicago.)

result, the inculcation of societal norms, is also being attacked. There is no question that many of these novels are "diligently didactic,"[1] but their effectiveness in indoctrinating young readers is highly suspect. It seems that these readers all too often completely ignore the message presented in the books they read.

An even more basic question than the internalization of the message is whether a message worth internalizing is being presented. Critics have found evidence that this is not always the case. An area in which the validity of the message has been questioned is the portrayal of adults and adulthood. Since the rise to popularity of the novel written for the young adult, many studies have been conducted upon this theme and the conclusion of several of these studies has been that junior novels often fail miserably in the picture they paint of maturity.

Junior novels have been a part of the library world for almost forty years and from their inception have been sharply criticized. Have writers in the genre been aware of the criticisms of its value and attempted to use this criticism as a springboard for improvement? Have they attempted to improve the quality of their portrayal of adult characters, making these characters more true to life?

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[1] Ibid., p. 340.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In what ways did the quality of the characterization of adult characters in novels written for teenagers change between 1950 and the late 1960's.

## EXPANDED PROBLEM STATEMENT

Novels for adolescent readers have been the subject of much criticism. Hopefully, writers in the genre have been conscious of this criticism, have examined it for its validity, and then used it as the foundation for improving the literature. This study examined a group of novels from the genre selected from popular, well-known authors. Novels on both sides of the time span indicated above were evaluated and compared on the basis of characterization, or the creation of credible persons for the novel. This comparison indicated the quality of the characterization of both periods and indicated any changes, either for better or worse, that had occurred.

A study of this nature should be of value to both teachers and young adult librarians. They are often called upon to recommend books to readers and should be knowledgeable about the value of and values in the books they recommend. More than that, however, the results of this study can serve as the springboard for a challenging discussion about adult respnsibilities between the teacher or librarian and teen-age readers. Well-done activities

of this nature not only will aid young people in their maturing, but will also help create an attitude of friendship toward and confidence in the adults with whom they are conducted.

Delimitations

Though junior novels have been criticized on many grounds, this study was limited to an evaluation of characterization, or the creation of credible persons for the novel. No other literary qualities were considered. No attempt was made to assess the value of the novels or to determine whether they properly belong in a library collection.

This paper did not present an in-depth study of every aspect of the characterizations in these novels. Rather, it was an attempt to present a summary of the salient features of the adult characterization.

## Chapter 2

## THE CONTROVERSIAL ADULT PORTRAYAL

Emma Patterson, author of novels for teen-agers, observed that the adolescent is often poorly adjusted to the world and stated that ". . . in junior novels he might well find help toward a solution of some of his own problems and a healthier understanding of his life."[1] One of the critical problems of adolescence is contained in the young person's striving toward maturity and adulthood. Patterson continued that the teen-ager passionately desires to become an adult and will seize on ". . . anything that will help him understand the thoughts of adults or partake, at least vicariously, of adult emotions. One of the best things his reading can do is to help him fulfill these desires."[2] Thus, one of the basic reasons for making the junior novels available is the hope that reading about well-drawn adult characters can help teen-agers to understand the role and responsibilities of adults in

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[1] Emma L. Patterson, "The Junior Novels and How They Grew," English Journal, 45 (October, 1956), 387.

[2] Ibid.

our society. Psychologists have come to the conclusion that identification with adult characters in books is one way a young person can begin to accept that part of his growing process.[1]

However, the fact that the junior novels are accepted as having the potential for filling this vital need in young adult reading does not mean that these books are also universally accepted as actually being good literature and meeting that need. They have been labelled "the bastard offspring of popular culture"[2] and accused of doing more harm than good in their role of helping young people cope with their problems and adapt to society.[3] Patterson stated that the need for an adult with whom teen-agers can identify presents the junior novelists with ". . . an opportunity, a challenge, and indeed and obligation. So far they have not done much about it . . . . It is too seldom that one finds here a true picture of the adult world or maturity of conduct displayed."[4]

In many of the junior novels adults simply do not play any significant role. This is not necessarily a weakness since among the developmental tasks proposed for this age group are achieving

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[1]Janis Berry, "Bibliotherapy," Catholic Library World, 39 (October, 1967), 127.

[2]Martinec, p. 339. [3]Patterson, p. 387. [4]Ibid.

independence from parents, and acquiring self-confidence and a system of values of one's own.[1] There is no doubt that the inclusion of only peripheral adults in a novel gives the reader of that novel an increased opportunity for developing those qualities. Yet at the same time, the lack of significant adults in the novel denies the teen-ager a possible adult with whom to identify.

Often an older character merely takes on the function of giving advice and interpreting the meaning of events for the younger characters.[2] This again is a role which has both positive and negative aspects. It does allow the teen-ager reading the novel to see that adults have had many experiences and have gained some insight which the older person can offer to the teen-agers to help with their problems. On the other hand, didacticism on the part of the adults is quite evident in many cases. This didacticism can very quickly alienate the teen-age reader from the adults who display it.

Adults Stereotyped

Most junior novels do have adults in significant roles, however. The contention of many critics is that all too often

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[1]Robert J. Havighurst, Human Development and Education (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1953), pp. 111, 123, 147.

[2]James E. Davis, "Recent Trends in Fiction for Adolescents," English Journal, 56 (May, 1967), 123.

these adult characters are extremely poorly drawn. One study observed that "few writers for adolescents are skillful in character portrayal."[1] Instead, they tend to categorize the characters and then proceed to the business of the story. The characterization of the parents in these novels has a very strong tendency to be stereotypic. The mothers were often young, attractive, and laden with patient wisdom; the fathers intelligent, somewhat indulgent, and in a state of mild frustration with their wheedling daughters. Whether these stereotypes carry throughout the genre, the consensus seemed to be that in books for adolescents, characterization is sacrificed to the plot and the adults quickly become no more than stock characters.

Oversimplification of Adults

The first step in stereotyping these characters is over-simplification. According to Barbara Perrins, the current tendency is to ". . . simplify beyond recognition the complexity of humans."[2] The adults in many of these novels have been reduced to the barest outlines of personality. They are often

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[1]Dwight L. Burton, "The Novel for the Adolescent," English Journal, 40 (September, 1951), 365.

[2]Barbara Perrins, "Current Trends in Teenage Literature," Catholic Library World, 43 (November, 1971), 155.

included in the stories merely to emphasize the characteristics of the teen-age characters. "Adult characters are seldom developed beyond a deus ex machina or foil . . .,"[1] so that readers know very little about them as persons. This in itself is not an irredeemable fault, as the use of foil characters to set the stage for the more central characters is a well-established literary device. It only becomes a weakness if the characters are at the same time unbelievable caricatures.

Adults Unable to Communicate

One of the common stereotypes is that all adults are unable to communicate with young people. Parents and teachers may be pictured as wise and benevolent, but they are almost always remote.[2] This portrayal recognizes the fact that adults may have the answers for which teen-agers are seeking, but insists that the adults are unable to communicate these insights.

Adults Incompetent

Another common picture depicts adults as almost completely incompetent. Martinec said that one of the formula ideas of these novels is that ". . . adults can't help you much. They mean well, but are ineffectual."[3] Lou Willett Staneck, Assistant

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[1]Lou Willett Staneck, "Adults and Adolescents: Ambivalence and Ambiguity," Library Journal, 99 (February 15, 1974), 534.

[2]Martinec, p. 343.

[3]Ibid., p. 344.

Director of the English Master of Arts in Teaching Program in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Chicago, echoed this observation, saying that the most strongly underlined formula idea is that adults cannot help and that teachers and parents fail miserably in every situation.[1]

One of the offshoots of the incompetent adult theory is the idea that only teen-agers can cope with the problems of the world. Staneck cited several novels which fall into this category and stated that ". . . one has visions of a new version of 'The Unknown Citizen,' showing a man controlled by the adolescent society rather than the establishment."[2] The teen-agers she used as examples were aware of serious problems that adults could not even be made to see and the teen-agers showed that ". . . adolescents are really kinder, wiser, more courageous, more competent, and more intelligent . . ."[3] than any adult. She concluded that the attitude of these books was that the adolescent must "solve his problem without the aid of an adult character."[4]

Adults As Villains

The next step beyond the incompetent adult is portraying the adult as the villain of the piece. Staneck observed that the

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[1]Lou Willett Staneck, "From Gestation to the Pill: The Maturation of the Junior Novel," Library Journal, 97 (December 15, 1972), 4050.

[2]Staneck, "Adults and Adolescents," p. 352.

[3]Ibid., p. 533.

[4]Ibid., p. 534.

enemies of the adolescent were often adult authority figures.[1] Richard Peck, author of novels for teen-agers, stated that mental illness was a major theme in junior novels and its cause could almost always be traced to parental neglect or instability. Whatever the problem, however, it "invariably" required only two paragraphs to return it to its source: the unsympathetic adult.[2] These books have a pronounced tendency to ". . . blame the parent for all the child's problems and transgressions."[3] B. W. Cooper, Head of the English Department of Pensnett Secondary School in Dudley, England, summed up the attitude portrayed in a great many novels when he said, "Frequently the very people who are in the best positions to help the adolescent during this period are the very ones who do the most harm."[4]

Not only did these novels distort the adult characters, but they also distorted adulthood itself. In far too many junior novels ". . . maturity means corruption."[5] The authors seemed to have the

> . . . conviction that children are right and good; intelligence and experience wrong and corrupting. . . . [Many books] . . . state definitely that there is little

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[1] Ibid., p. 531.

[2] Richard Peck, "In the Country of Teenage Fiction," American Libraries, 4 (April, 1973), 207.

[3] Perrins, pp. 156-7.

[4] B. W. Cooper, "The Adolescent in Contemporary Fiction," School Librarian, 19 (June, 1971), 120.

[5] Peck, p. 205.

> value in being an adult. You become insensitive, sell out and lose your courage. . . . [The junior novel has a] . . . long tradition of adults coveting the incorruptible innocence of youth and rejecting the value of experience which only debases.[1]

While it is true that examples of all these types of undesirable adult characters and relationships between adults and teen-agers can be found in junior novels, it is also true that in life adults are not perfect and often do have these problems. Under these circumstances it would be ridiculous to condemn a novel's characterization on the basis of imperfections in the characters portrayed. A truly worthwhile novel, one that would provide the best adult role model, would be a novel that portrayed adults and their reactions and relationships in a life-like manner. In a novel of this type, the characters would sometimes fail in their attempts, but they would also sometimes succeed. The adults would have faults as well as desirable characteristics. Their actions might be either right or wrong, but the reader would be able to see them as people and understand their motivation.

In recent years there has been a very evident and widespread change in the basic nature of young adult literature as a genre. The emphasis now is on realism and recent years have produced a

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[1]Staneck, "Adults and Adolescents," pp. 532-533.

spate of "tell-it-like-it-is" books.[1] The apparent criteria of these books include such ideas as that novels should not lie to young readers; they should be completely honest about life.[2] Logically, this attitude of honesty in the portrayal of life would extend to honesty in the portrayal of characters.

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[1]G. R. Carlsen, "Forty Years With Books and Teenage Readers," Arizona English Bulletin, 14 (April, 1972), 2.

[2]Wayne Litfiy, "The Times They Are A Changin'," Arizona English Bulletin, 14 (April, 1972), 109.

## Chapter 3

## EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### BOOK SELECTION

In choosing the books to be studied, it was decided to deal with novels written for young girls as that is an area in which great change has taken place. Many of the so-called realistic books were published during the 1960's,[1] so an approximately twenty-year gap between the two groups seemed appropriate: one group from about 1950 and the other from books published near 1970. The specific titles were chosen on the basis of two articles dealing with the junior novel. In "Forty Years With Books and the Teenage Reader," G. R. Carlsen, author of Books and The Teenage Reader, named four authors (Betty Cavanna, Ann Emery, Rosamond du Jardin, and Mary Stolz) as among the most popular authors for teen-age girls.[2] Each of these authors had a book published in 1950 and thus Spring Comes Riding by Betty Cavana, Going Steady by Ann Emergy, Wait for Marcy by Rosamond du Jardin, and To Tell Your Love by Mary Stolz came to form the basis of the first half of this study.

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[1]The three used in this study being only a few examples out of many.

[2]Carlsen, p. 2.

Lou Willett Staneck wrote in her article "From Gestation to the Pill: The Maturation of the Junior Novel" that though some aspects of the genre have changed, more recent romances for the group still follow the same formula plot. She cited four books to prove her point. Since these books are of the same basic type as the earlier novels, a comparison seemed possible. Henry Gregor Felsen's Two and the Town was discarded since it was first published in 1952 and was thus too close to the others to show any significant difference. The remaining novels were Too Bad About the Haines Girl by Zoa Sherburne (1967), Mr. and Mrs. BoJo Jones by Ann Head (1967), and My Darling, My Hamburger by Paul Zindel (1969).[1] These three were used as the modern basis for comparison of the characteristics of adult portrayal in novels written for teen-age girls.

## EVALUATION

The first step in the study was an evaluation of the adults' importance in the novels, a determination as to whether the adult characters played a significant interactive role or were merely present. If the adults merely appeared in the novel rather than taking part in the development of the story, they would not have

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[1] Staneck, "From Gestation to the Pill," p. 4047.

been fully characterized and any novel of that type would have been excluded from the study.

The evaluation of the characterization itself was along the lines suggested by Laurence Perrine in his textbook Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense. He listed three principles for convincing characterization: consistency, motivation, and plausibility.[1]

Consistency

This involved two main ideas. First, the speech and behavior of the character must be what one would expect of a person of that age and background. Second, as the story progressed, the character's speech and actions must have been consistent with what he said and did in the beginning, unless a reason was given for a change.

Motivation

The character must have reasons for what he said and did. The reader need not necessarily agree with the character, but at least by the end of the story the reader must be able to understand why the character acted and talked as he did. If any development occurred, cause must have been shown for that also.

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[1]Laurence Perrine, Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), p. 68.

Plausibility

The character must be convincing and credible. He must be neither a paragon, nor a monster, nor an impossible combination of contradictory traits. Both strengths and weaknesses should be shown. The character should not be stereotyped, as no person fits perfectly into a prefabricated mold.

Scope of Activity

An additional criterion was added in requiring that the novels also present an accurate picture of adult activities.[1] Adults have a wide variety of responsibilities and must function in many spheres, examples being home, professions, church and social organizations. An adequate portrayal of an adult character would include many of these areas rather than showing the adult in only a few facets of activity.

After the evaluation information had been gathered for each book, the books were compared to determine whether there had indeed been any change in the portrayal of adult characters in novels for young girls since the recent emphasis on realism and a true-to-life presentation in the genre. This change was then evaluated.

It should be made entirely clear that what was sought was not perfection on the part of the adult characters. What was sought

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[1] W. Bernard Lukenbill, "Fathers in Adolescent Novels: Some Implications for Sex-Role Reinterpretations," Library Journal, 99 (February 15, 1974), 537.

was honesty and credibility. "Certainly ignorant and cruel parents do exist in the world, and . . . adolescents should not be shielded from reality."[1] "Literature has a long tradition of villains . . ."[2] and the objection to these villains in young adult literature should not be that villains are included or even that they are parents. Many outstanding novels have been written for young adults which portray harsh, eccentric, or foolish adults. The real issue is the credibility of the personality and role of the adult characters. A falsely perfect adult no more forms an adequate figure with whom to identify than a total villain. The critical factor is whether the characters are believeably drawn and the reader is given enough information to understand why these people are what they are and act as they do.

The ideal adult character is one that adds up to a complete facsimile of a human being. The adults in these (and, indeed, in all) novels must portray "human nature in all its complexity and multiplicity."[3] A good characterization will result in a person that the reader has a feeling of knowing, one the reader feels he would recognize if they met on the street.

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[1]Staneck, "Adults and Adolescents," p. 532.

[2]Ibid., p. 533.

[3]Perrine, p. 67.

## Chapter 4

## ADULT CHARACTERIZATION

All seven of the books examined contained adult characters who played a significant role in the development of the story. In each case, the most important adults were the parents of the young people involved in the romance. Several of the books did present other adult characters who, though their roles were much smaller, did enlarge the boundaries of the general adult picture portrayed in that novel.

As the most significant adults were present mainly as parents, an evaluation of the manner in which they filled this responsibility was necessary to an adequate evaluation of the total adult characterization. Another issue, the role of women in society, was touched upon in evaluating the scope of the activities in which the adults participated. In these days of increased feminism, emphasis on any novel which showed women in only the role of wife and mother in the home must be deemed inadequate. There is nothing inherently wrong with these roles and any woman should be free to choose them. However, they should not be shown to the exclusion of all other types of activity.

GOING STEADY

The main adult characters in this book by Anne Emery were the parents of Sally Burnaby and George (Scotty) Scott, the characters who carried the love interest. The characterization in this book was interesting in that the four adults were shown largely through Sally's eyes. They did figure in the action of the story, but the reader got to know them more through Sally's opinions of their actions than through the actions themselves.

The major role of the adults in this novel was to disapprove. Sally's mother did not like the way her daughter was wasting the summer. Both the Burnabys were happy about Sally's purchase of an expensive vase when the money was needed in so many other areas. More than any other area, however, the four parents were united in their violent disapproval of Sally and Scotty's going steady and eventual engagement. Though both Sally and Scotty had graduated from high school, their parents adamantly insisted they were too young to consider marriage.

These characters were very consistent: from beginning to end they were shown doing little other than attempting to get Sally and Scotty to break off their relationship. The courses of action the parents pursued varied from reasoning to not-so-sly machinations, but they seemed to have few other goals.

Sally's mother wondered aloud whether the couple were not seeing too much of each other.[1] Scotty's mother invited Sally to a family picnic and then did her best to keep the two of them either separated or busy playing croquet.[2] All four parents tried to use reasonable arguments to convince Sally and Scotty that they were too young to marry, including discussions of the responsibilities of marriage and the college life they would be missing. A major portion of the plot hung on parental disapproval of the engagement, just as a large part of the action of the story was devoted to discouraging Sally and Scotty.

The parents were somewhat more credible than their singlemindedness would have it appear. Through Sally's complaints about the lack of understanding and the destructiveness of the family's relationship came a picture of what was instead a fairly normal family, with both problems and good times. When the summer temperature became unbearably hot, tempers frayed and the family began to bicker.[3] The parents obviously felt and reacted, sometimes unreasonably, to pressures from family and work. On the other hand, Mrs. Burnaby would interrupt her work to listen to Sally's news[4] and Mr. Burnaby made a point of discussing politics and plans with Scotty on a man-to-man basis.[5]

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[1]Anne Emery, Going Steady (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 35.

[2]Ibid., pp. 81-5. [3]Ibid., p. 8. [4]Ibid., p. 94.

[5]Ibid., pp. 73, 165.

The credibility of the characters was helped by the fact that the reason behind their disapproval was expressed throughout the book. They loved their children and wanted to keep Sally and Scotty from making what they saw as a serious mistake. They may not have always approached the problem in the best way, but their motives were honest.

There were some problems with the characterization of the adults in the novel. Emery included several stereotypic qualities. For example, Mrs. Burnaby, who was young and attractive, dreamed of the day her daughter would be the beautiful bride,[1] while Mr. Burnaby was one with "all" men in hating any occasion which required him to dress up.[2]

The major problem with the characterization, however, was its incompleteness. The parents appeared almost constantly throughout the book, but they never came to life. Emery met some of the criteria, but she never gave to any of her characters that individuality which makes them recognizable as human beings.

## TO TELL YOUR LOVE

As with all the books, the main adults were the parents, in this case Mr. and Mrs. Armacost. They played a fairly large part in the book. They got along well with their children and

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[1] Ibid., p. 106. [2] Ibid., p. 103.

shared many activities and conversation. All of these encounters between the parents and their children were appealing, for the Armacosts were the most loveable adults a reader could ever hope to encounter.

Mr. Armacost was the "perfect" English teacher and father. As a teacher, he was knowledgeable and inspiring (though without ever being shown in a teaching situation in the book) and he did not parade his ability. As a father, he was humorous and understanding[1] and showed great concern for his children's feelings.[2] He disciplined his children when necessary, but was gentle in reproof.[3] He even accepted that he could not run his childrens' lives.[4]

Mrs. Armacost was in the kitchen throughout the majority of the book. Nearly all her conversations took place in that room and included food at some point. One daughter, Theo, was a nurse and no matter how early she had to be at the hospital, Mrs. Armacost was up first to make a breakfast.[5] She worked herself almost into dispair because the melon balls for a fruit salad she was making weren't perfectly round.[6] The greatest problem and source of guilt in her life was that, carefully hidden from the rest of the family, she made muffins, cookies, cakes, and piecrusts

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[1]Mary Stolz, To Tell Your Love (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), p. 7.

[2]Ibid., p. 130. [3]Ibid., p. 87. [4]Ibid., p. 64.

[5]Ibid., p. 5. [6]Ibid., pp. 83, 85-6.

from mixes.[1] She did emerge from her concentration on food long enough to admit that she enjoyed ironing,[2] to worry about her furniture,[3] and to dote on babies.[4]

In fact, this novel would give a supporter of the women's movement nightmares, for all the adult women were decidedly bird-witted. (Oddly enough, most of the younger ones escaped this fate.) Mrs. Armacost was terrified of thunderstorms and no amount of reasoning could persuade her that a person could talk on the phone during a storm and not get electrocuted through their ears.[5] While her conversations may have been amusing, they were often idiotic. The following example is not unusual:

> During dinner Mrs. Armacost suddenly remembered something. "Dear?" she addressed her husband, who was thinking about hummingbirds. Her eye slid over to Johnny, in the act of smuggling meat to [the cat]. "Don't do that," she said sharply.
> Mr. Armacost's eyes widened. "I wasn't," he replied defensively. "Not a thing."
> "I didn't mean you, I meant Johnny."
> "You said 'Dear.'"
> "Can't I call Johnny 'dear'?"
> "Of course. But it sounded like my sort of 'dear,' not his."
> "Well, it was."
> "I thought you said you were talking to Johnny?"
> "I was. But not the 'dear.'"
> "Oh. Well, that's what I thought." He waited. "Did you want something?" he asked at length.
> "Yes, I'd like Johnny to stop feeding July at the table."

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[1]Ibid., pp. 8, 11, 154. [2]Ibid., p. 50. [3]Ibid., p. 1.

[4]Ibid., p. 200. [5]Ibid., pp. 76-8.

"Would you like me to speak to him about it?" Mr. Armacost asked, a little bewildered.

"That won't be necessary. I already have."

They waited.

"Dear?" Mrs. Armacost said, with a slight edge to her voice.

"Well, yes, my love. I'm here."

"I would like to know whether you do or do not wish to play bridge with the Robinsons tonight."

"You mean play bridge around them, don't you? he inquired, deciding not to notice that the matter hadn't actually been mentioned till now.

Mrs. Armacost ceded him a point. "But they're getting better," she insisted.

"Naturally, I'd be delighted to play."

"That's good. We'd better hurry because I said we'd get there by eight."

"So good of you to consult me."

"I always," Mrs. Armacost said seriously, "like to ask you about things. Women who ride slipshod over their husbands get little pleasure from it in the end."

"Is this something you believe?" her husband asked curiously.

"It's something I say."[1]

This is amusing, but hardly edifying.

Another woman in the book lived with her brother and son. She could never predict what these two men would do and so decided that the "wisest course was one of passive and loving admiration."[2] She had found that being completely mystified by the men in her life was very pleasant and made no further attempt to understand them. Instead, she stayed at home and approved all their actions.

Aside from this unfortunate tendency to have the women shallow, the adults in this novel were all too good to be realistic. With one very minor exception, the only unsympathetic characters

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[1]Ibid., pp. 120-121. [2]Ibid., p. 184.

were young people. The adults were never in any way unappealing, for even their faults were loveable. The reader could not help liking all these characters, but the characterization was very poor. Adults have faults also. Unfortunately, the process of maturing does not result in perfection. These adult characters were nice, but not people, and therefore could not serve as models for young readers.

## WAIT FOR MARCY

As usual, the main adult characters were parents and they appeared only as parents in this novel. Almost the only activities Mr. and Mrs. Rhodes figured in were concerned with raising their children. Mr. Rhodes' profession was mentioned only once and the reader was aware that Mrs. Rhodes had had nurse's training only because she was called upon to cope with all the neighborhood accidents and illnesses.[1]

The Rhodes adults were shown in familial rather than worldly situations. Mrs. Rhodes knitted sweaters for her daughter Marcy[2] and cleaned her room, even though Marcy was fifteen. Mr. Rhodes cleaned the car and was available for loans when his son Ken spent allowance too quickly,[3] and worried that Marcy's formal

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[1]Rosamond du Jardin, Wait for Marcy (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1950), p. 19.

[2]Ibid., p. 10. [3]Ibid., p. 89.

was too mature for her.[1] It was almost as though they had no existence outside of their home.

If Mr. and Mrs. Rhodes' activities were somewhat limited, they carry out those activities gracefully. They tried to maintain peace between their children,[2] but they also realized that they must often step back and let the young people work out their own problems.[3] They spent a lot of time listening to their children and honestly shared their disappointments and triumphs. The family communicated well with each other and parents and children loved and respected each other. Though anyone reading this novel would get a very narrow view of the responsibilities of adult life, they would at least see a fairly positive view of those few activities.

Mr. and Mrs. Rhodes' behavior was very consistent, for the narrow scope of their activities left them no room for inconsistency. Their motivation was equally clear-cut: almost all their actions stemmed from love for their children and a desire to make Ken and Marcy as happy as possible.

The only grounds for criticism then became plausibility, and it is here that these characters failed. Mr. and Mrs. Rhodes were appealing, but just not real. Real life ranges far outside the home and parents have other concerns than their families. They were

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[1]Ibid., p. 71. [2]Ibid., p. 15. [3]Ibid., p. 145.

also too appealing, for adults are not perfect and Mr. and Mrs. Rhodes as portrayed in this novel had no faults. A teen-age reader may wish her parents were as kind, generous, sympathetic, and even-tempered as Mr. and Mrs. Rhodes, but chances are the parents will not be. Mr. and Mrs. Rhodes simply did not present a realistic picture of maturity to young readers.

## SPRING COMES RIDING

Mr. and Mrs. Sanderson, the parents in this novel, led a somewhat fuller life than did the parents in the other novels. They were very involved parents, yet at the same time they managed to retain interests and contacts in the world outside their home. They played a smaller role in the story than did the parents in many of the novels and perhaps the reason they had a personality beyond that of parent is because they did not perform so much in their role as parents.

Mr. Sanderson's career was discussed frequently in the novel and played a fairly large part in shaping the personality and desires of at least one daughter, Meg. He was the fiction editor for a publishing company,[1] before which he had been a war

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[1]Betty Cavanna, Spring Comes Riding (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1950), p. 8.

correspondent for an unspecified newspaper.[1] He had been all over the world and thoroughly enjoyed these experiences.[2] He had the distinction of even being shown at work occasionally.

Mrs. Sanderson seemed to be as involved with her horses as she was with her family and was definitely the force behind the family stable. She loved horses and was very knowledgeable about their care and handling. She made the decisions about the running of the stable[3] and saw to it that her daughters were learning to be as competent around horses as she was.

Mr. and Mrs. Sanderson had more of a relationship between themselves than was common in these novels. They did things together such as making Christmas cards[4] or going out to call on friends.[5] They even occasionally went away for a weekend and left their daughters home alone.[6] They were shown as having an open, loving, humorous, and secure relationship. They were much more a married couple than were most of the parents.

The fact that Mr. and Mrs. Sanderson had a life beyond parenthood did not mean that they ignored this responsibility. Both showed their love for their daughters openly and helped the girls as much as possible. Mr. Sanderson and Meg in particular had a good relationship. He was aware when she was unhappy or troubled

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[1]Ibid., p. 25. [2]Ibid., p. 61. [3]Ibid., p. 44.
[4]Ibid., p. 152. [5]Ibid., p. 35. [6]Ibid., p. 57.

and understood her moods even when she could not express them. He encouraged Meg to do things that were difficult for her and then did his best to help her get through these endeavors successfully. He listened to her plans and tried to help her sort out what she wanted to do with her future. He got along beautifully with Meg, but then, he did the same with all his daughters. Though she was discussed much less, Mrs. Sanderson basically had the same relationship with her daughters.

This very perfection which has been described became the parents' main flaw. As with the parents in most of the early books, Mr. and Mrs. Sanderson were basically paragons of virtue. As in the other novels, they were appealing, but the unreality of this poor characterization robbed them of the privilege of honestly presenting a good model to a young reader struggling to reach maturity.

SUMMARY--OLD NOVELS

The parents in these novels were, on the whole, very much alike. They showed few of the responsibilities and activities of adults other than those directly connected with the home. The fathers may have been employed, but this fact was not allowed to interfere with their being fathers. The mothers were equally involved in the traditional tasks of motherhood. Their main concern seemed to be cooking, but they were allowed to interrupt this job to do the laundry, clean house, make clothes for their children,

and even a little bit of nursing. On the whole, the adults in these novels seemed to have almost no existence outside their homes.

These adults were also generally paragons. They were seldom short-tempered or impatient. They wanted only the best for their children and were prepared to do as much as possible to see that those children had anything that could possibly be desired. In three out of the four novels the parents were invariably sympathetic and understanding in their relationship with their children, sharing both joys and disappointments at all times.

There were exceptions to these generalizations, of course. As noted above, the Sandersons in Spring Comes Riding had several outside interests and the Burnabys of Going Steady were allowed to bicker at times. These were the rare exceptions, however.

These adult characters did succeed in being extraordinarily consistent. Of course, their narrow lives left little room for differing actions, but they never did step outside the boundaries established for their characters at the beginning of the novel. Their motivation was equally clear-cut: almost all their actions were based upon love for their children and a desire to have everything turn out right for those children.

For the most part, the adult characters had too narrow a sphere of activity and were much too good to be considered as reflecting reality. These adults were generally appealing, but

they did not offer well-rounded models for a teen-age reader to emulate in striving to achieve adult status.

## TOO BAD ABOUT THE HAINES GIRL

This was the earliest of the group of novels published in the 1960's and though its plot showed some elements of the realism which was taking over adolescent literature at the time it was written, the adult characterization was remarkably similar to that in the books published in 1950. They were still almost completely involved in their families and very patient and understanding.

Mr. Haines had developed somewhat beyond the average father in the earlier novels. He was very involved in his work, just as caught up in that aspect of his life as he was in his family. He even missed breakfast with his family in order to have a special meeting with a customer over that meal.[1] He also had some outside interests, such as going bowling every week.[2] Despite these distractions, fatherhood was still vital to his characterization, however.

Mrs. Haines, on the other hand, was as tied to her housework and motherhood as any other mother in any of the books. She was frequently encountered cooking meals for her family. She rousted her daughters out of bed every morning and prodded them into

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[1] Zoa Sherburne, Too Bad About the Haines Girl (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1967), p. 133.

[2] Ibid., p. 70.

arriving at school on time. She was exceptionally considerate about chauffeuring her children and their friends anywhere.[1] She was also always amenable to feeding and housing her daughters' friends.[2]

Both parents were what could be termed good parents. They encouraged their daughters to come to them with all their problems.[3] They taught their children moral values and tried to indicate proper standards.[4] They accepted Melinda's friends and boyfriend and tried to make all at ease in their home. Of course, most parents who take this responsibility seriously would try to do all these things and be as happy, generous, and loving as possible. The sad fact that, no matter how hard they try, no parent is able to have all these attributes at all times was the major problem with their characterization. Paragons are not plausible.

The plausibility of Mr. and Mrs. Haines' characterization was helped by their reaction to the news that Melinda was pregnant: they were shocked and hurt, but controlled these emotions and began attempting to help Melinda get through the situation.[5] This behavior was entirely consistent with their

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[1] Ibid., p. 71.

[2] Ibid., pp. 59, 65.

[3] Ibid., p. 10.

[4] Ibid., pp. 10, 19.

[5] Ibid., pp. 184-9.

behavior throughout the novel, for a genuine love of their daughters and a desire for their happiness had been a prime motivation. Parents with this attitude would react just as they did, trying to help their children as much as possible. Their sorrow and hurt was a natural reaction, as was their attempt to hide it.

The mother of Melinda's best friend, Suky Marlowe, was not nearly so sympathetic. She was raising Suky by herself and was shown working very hard to support her daughter, even bringing work home with her at night.[1] Mrs. Marlowe's problem was that she allowed Suky absolutely no freedom, even at seventeen. Suky may have been a senior in high school, but she was not allowed to go to boy-girl parties, let alone have a date. Mrs. Marlowe even discouraged boys from coming to their apartment to see Suky.[2] The exact motivation for this behavior was never made clear, though it was often guessed at. It was known, however, that Suky's father had deserted the two of them,[3] which probably could be considered an adequate reason for distrusting men.

Whatever her reasons, Mrs. Marlowe was not as near perfection as Mr. and Mrs. Haines. She seemed to be the novel's attempt toward realism in the matter of characterization. She, at least, was an admission of the fact that unfortunately adults are not

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[1]Ibid., p. 58. [2]Ibid., p. 62. [3]Ibid., p.57.

perfect. The picture of maturity presented in this book was much like that in the earlier novels, but an attempt to move toward a realistic presentation was apparent. In this novel, a teen-age reader would at least have seen that adults do have faults, but that it is possible for them to be good people despite these faults.

MY DARLING, MY HAMBURGER

There were four sets of parents in this book and though they were very different from each other, they were just as different from the nearly perfect parents of the earlier books. Gone were the young, good-looking, loving parents previously discussed. The parents in this novel bore little resemblance to those paragons.

Maggie's parents were the closest to the old style. The family was close-knit. They loved each other and cared about the activities, the disappointments, the triumphs of the other members. The Tobins were able to talk to Maggie about many things: her dates,[1] her friends,[2] even how she felt about the boy she was dating and what to look for in a prospective husband.[3] They were

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[1]Paul Zindel, My Darling, My Hamburger (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 8.

[2]Ibid., p. 24. [3]Ibid., p. 26.

not perfect, but they tried very hard. However, they had horrible taste, which never would have been permitted before. Mrs. Tobin was not a perfect housekeeper[1] and admitted there were jobs around the house she did not enjoy doing.[2]

The other three sets of parents were almost complete contrasts. Dennis' parents, for example, were nothing if not consistent: they did not seem to care about anything but their garbags. They appeared only twice in the story and though at both times Dennis was having some upsetting personal problems, they were totally oblivious of his feelings. Instead they told him that he needed to rinse the garbage cans out to get rid of the coffee grounds, that he was killing the grass by putting the garbage cans on it, and always that he needed to wash the cans out with warm water and disinfectant.[3]

Sean's mother never appeared at all, but his father was a prime example of the worst a person can become as an adult. He was conceited, shallow, and mercenary, and as far as he was concerned the whole world was a dirty joke. He even talked about Sean's girlfriend Liz as merely a good-looking sex object in front of his friends and Sean because it brought some laughs.[4] He pretended to talk to his son, but instead only talked around Sean.

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[1]Ibid., p. 71. [2]Ibid., p. 26.

[3]Ibid., pp. 28-9, 81-3. [4]Ibid., pp. 27-8.

A prime example would be the following conversation between Sean and his father:

> "A friend of mine's in trouble with a girl and he asked me for advice and I don't know what to tell him."
> His father's eyes lit up. "That's what he gets for playing around with the old kazoo." He let out a raucous laugh, and Sean joined him. Mr. Collins stopped in the middle of the laugh, then very seriously he said, "It's not you, son, is it?"
> Sean smiled. "No. . . . Just one of the guys at school. I told him I'd ask you. That's if you don't mind."
> "It's Dennis, I'll bet!? Mr. Collins howled. "You mean to tell me that skinny toothpick's been--"
> "Not Dennis. You don't know this guy. He was in my biology class."
> "He sure didn't pay attention." Mr. Collins roared again.

After telling Sean that the boy had to make sure that the girl was really pregnant and that the baby did not belong to someone else, Mr. Collins gave his advice:

> "Then you get friends."
> "Friends?"
> "Yep. You get a few friends. You only need a few. Get 'em to call the girl or go up and talk to her. She'll get the point and get scared."
> "Dad. . ."
> "You say the kid's got money. Comes from a money family?"
> "Yes. Some."
> "Then you tell her to get an operation. You tell that guy to spend a few bucks."

Mr. Collins assured Sean that there would be no problem getting any doctor to perform an abortion:

> "If the money's right, they'd do a lobotomy. Take my word for it. Even our family doctor. He signs

> anything I tell him to. That car accident I was in years ago. He knew I didn't have whiplash. Five thousand I got out of that one. Remember?"[1]

He was too busy admiring his own "wit" to even realize when Sean was asking him for help and completely convinced that everyone shared his mercenary values.

Liz's mother and stepfather appeared more frequently than did the other adults, but they definitely were not presented as the kind of parents for which anyone would wish. Liz gave the impression that before her mother remarried, the two of them had gotten along quite well, but that situation had definitely changed with the addition of a stepfather to the household. Much of the problem seemed to stem from Mr. Palladino, who appeared to be convinced that Liz had the lack of moral standards Sean's father had indicated. Rather than trying to make friends with Liz, he gave arbitrary orders, openly disapproved of everything she did, and automatically assumed the worst in every situation. If Mrs. Palladino worried about Liz staying out late, her husband said Liz stayed out far too late and set a time she must be in every night.[2] When asked to corroborate that Liz did look pretty when all dressed up for a date, he merely said that her dress was too low-cut.[3] When Sean's car got a flat tire on the way home from a

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[1]Ibid., pp. 87-91. [2]Ibid., p. 24.

[3]Ibid., p. 49.

dance and Liz called home to tell her parents she would be late, he assumed she was lying and ordered her to come home immediately.[1] Liz's mother attempted to play peacemaker, but her feeble attempts to get her husband to approve of Liz occasionally were as ineffectual as her attempts to convince Liz to obey his orders at least once in a while.

The adults were certainly consistent, but generally there was no apparent motivation for their behavior. Mrs. Palladino evidently changed in an attempt to please her new husband, but there was no indication of the reasons behind the behavior of any of the other adults. They were also completely confined to their homes, a scope of activity as limited as in any of the earlier books.

The adult characters in this book had changed from the early pattern only in that they were mirror opposites of the adults in those early books. They were no longer perfection personified, but they were no closer to being realistic. Maturity results in total villainy no more than it results in perfection. It is no more plausible to present adults without any good traits than it is to present adults with only desireable traits.

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[1] Ibid., p. 67.

## MR. AND MRS. BOJO JONES

The characterization of the adults in this novel was the best in any of the seven books presented. Mr. and Mrs. Greher and Mr. and Mrs. Jones emerged as real people, people anyone could on the street and recognize, much more than did the parents in the other books. This was partially because they played a larger role than did the other parents, but mostly because they had been given real personalities with both good and bad traits.

Both sets of parents were told of their teen-age childrens' marriage early in the book. Both reacted as their behavior up to that point and as what had been said about them would have the reader expect them to react. Mr. and Mrs. Jones were furiously upset and immediately informed BoJo and July that they were on their own as far as the future was concerned.[1] Mr. and Mrs. Greher were equally, but more quietly upset and immediately began trying to run BoJo and July's future.[2] From this point on, the two sets of parents were so involved in their childrens' marriage that the reader began to know them well.

The Joneses changed their minds, of course, and did their best to help BoJo and July. Mrs. Jones tried to teach July to cook

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[1]Ann Head, Mr. and Mrs. BoJo Jones (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1967), pp. 38-40.

[2]Ibid., pp. 38-40, 44-8.

and run a house. They tried to help plan the future and give the couple what they could. This change was very believeable, for it stemmed not from acceptance of the marriage which still upset them, but from love for their son and a desire to help BoJo. They were still obviously sick with disappointment and they somewhat openly disliked July and her family. They remained short-tempered and stubborn, but they sincerely tried to be good parents.

July's parents continued trying to run her life to the end. At one point Mrs. Greher told July, "We would give you the moon if we thought it was good for you, right for you."[1] This exactly summed up their attitude toward their daughter and her husband: the parents were sure that they knew best and that BoJo and July should always follow their advice. That they did this from a genuine love for their daughter and from the very defensible position that BoJo and July had made no great success of running their own lives made the parents' attitude understandable, but not right.

The relationship between the two sets of parents brought out the worst in both. Mr. Jones' uncontrolled temper and his wife's complete lack of any kind of sense of humor showed clearly, as did the Greher's superior attitude. Yet, even here, the basic

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[1]Ibid., p. 177.

goodness of these adults showed, for they kept making the effort to be friends though they disliked each other.

These four adults may not have been as appealing on the surface as the Armacosts in To Tell Your Love, but they had the advantage of being real human beings. They mixed good and bad into believeable and complex personalities. They often fell short of their desires, but because of both the desires and the failures they did succeed in the larger business of coming to life in the pages of the book.

The professions of these men were brought out more than was common in the books. Mr. Greher worked in a bank and arranged for BoJo to be employed there also.[1] Mr. Jones worked with construction and some of the implications of this job for his family were presented, including small pay and frequent moves.[2] Its influence on BoJo was seen in his having dammed every stream of water he found while a boy.[3]

For the first time, one of these romances offered adults who came close to reflecting the reality of the adult world. The Joneses and the Grehers showed that maturity is a time of continued struggle, of striving to overcome faults. These people were the only ones in the group to give teen-age readers a true picture of the kind of life they could expect as they grew older.

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[1]Ibid., p. 54. [2]Ibid., p. 35. [3]Ibid., p. 83.

## SUMMARY--RECENT NOVELS

The books published during the late 1960's presented a much more varied, though not necessarily more realistic, picture of maturity than did the books published in 1950. These books containted both loveable and hateable parents, but the authors still had a hard time giving a realistic picture of those parents. In only one of the books were the adults realistic in that they were given the complex combinations of traits that characterize the human race.

These books had made a step in the right direction in recognizing that adults have faults, but they did not indicate that the basic quality of the adult characterization had improved since, as noted before, all bad is no better than all good. One of the new books, Mr. and Mrs. BoJo Jones, managed to escape the trap of the two extremes, but one book was not enough to establish that the genre is improving. It was, however, a hopeful sign.

## Chapter 5

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The four criteria used in evaluating these seven novels were the plausibility, evident motivation, consistency, and scope of activity of the adult characters. On the whole, these books were deficient in these areas, though they were better in some than in others.

The novels probably had the best record in the area of consistency. The personality of the adult characters was established and its boundaries were not crossed throughout the novel. The Armacosts were tolerant and humorous throughout To Tell Your Love, just as the Grehers tried to run their daughter's life from beginning to end of Mr. and Mrs. BoJo Jones. Had this been the only criterion, all seven novels would have been very successful.

The motivation of the adults was generally evident in these books. Most of the adults were parents and their overriding motive for almost all actions was love for their children. This was another area in which the books generally met the criteria, with the exception of My Darling, My Hamburger where most of the parents had no apparent motivation. The motivation of the parents in other novels was apparent enough to justify a generally favorable rating in this area also.

The books really began to fall short in the plausibility of the adult characters. The characters in four (three from 1950 and one from 1967) of the seven books were too good to be true. They were uniformly tolerant, generous, and good-natured. The parents in My Darling, My Hamburger were in general no better portrayed, but had the opposite problem of being incredibly bad. Only two of the novels, Going Steady and Mr. and Mrs. BoJo Jones, had adult characters who were believeable mixtures of good and bad traits.

The early books had an additional problem with plausibility in that the adults had a strong stereotypic tendency. The stock characters described in Chapter Two of this study would fit all the parents in this group, though the Burnaby's of Going Steady came close to escaping the mold. The parents in the earliest novel of the later group, Mr. and Mrs. Haines in Too Bad About the Haines Girl, were also of the same type. The parents could be interchanged among these novels without any major problems.

The scope of the adult activities was very narrow. The professions of the men seldom were important, and often were barely mentioned. There were exceptions where the occupation of the father helped in shaping the personality of the children, notably Spring Comes Riding and Mr. and Mrs. BoJo Jones, but occupation was negligible in most of the books. Except that they were gone during the day, the jobs of most of the fathers would

have had no effect on the stories. None of the mothers worked outside of the home and only one belonged to a women's organization. A few of the couples belonged to country clubs, but they almost never used these facilities.

On the basis of this study, one would have to assume that the characterization of adults in romances written for teen-age girls is generally quite poor. The scope of activity given to these characters is almost unbelieveably narrow, for they have few functions outside of their homes. The profession of the men is rarely mentioned and the women do little except housework. This in no way accurately reflects the variety of responsibilities and activities of the real adult world.

The real problem with the characterization, however, is the narrowness with which the adult personalities are generally painted. These characters tend to be either all good or all bad, either paragons or villains. The process of maturing results in the loss of neither all desirable traits nor all undesirable ones, despite all the evidence to the contrary in these seven books.

In the strictest sense, then, the adult portrayal has manifested no real improvement over the twenty years covered by the books in this study, as the characterization is generally no more realistic in the later books than in the earlier. However, the study does give some basis for hope that this unfortunate situation may be somedav remedied. The original perfection of

the adults has been sharply contrasted by the overwhelmingly unsympathetic nature of the adults in one of the later books. What remains now is to achieve a balance between the two extremes, a goal in which Mr. and Mrs. BoJo Jones achieved some success. What has been done once can be repeated and therein lies the hope for improvement in subsequent books. On the basis of this study, the genre as it stands now has few valid adult models, but there are some signs that the future may be brighter.

## Suggestions for Future Research

Even the most recent book analyzed in this study was published eight years ago. Another study could be conducted using these same criteria with a group of books published in the 1970's to evaluate the adult portrayal in very recent novels.

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